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ABSTRACT

This paper advocates development of humanistic education which will emphasize concern for student self-concept and empathy for others through a multidisciplinary approach. A survey conducted by the Educational Development Center in 1976 showed that only three out of 143 educational materials reviewed dealt with systems behavior, stressed the individual's role in problem solving, supplied positive models for solutions, or gave positive views of other cultures. This apparent lack of humanistic curriculum materials occurs in a society which is committed to technological manipulation of people and their skills. This has produced a high degree of absenteeism in the schools by students critical of the educational structure, shrinking public confidence in education, and a short-term utilitarian view of education. Fortunately, this dismal picture is changing. American society is developing a newly cultivated respect for the artisan and a movement towards self-sufficiency which questions the technological direction of society. The resultant concern for strong self-concept is being reflected in new curriculums and in the participation of non-traditional educators in the schools. The current need in education is a synthesis of technology with humanistic awareness. (MR)

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BRIGHT GLOW OR DARK SHADOWS IN EDUCATION'S CRYSTAL BALL?

PROSPECTS FOR A HUMANISTIC CURRICULUM

Paper prepared for the First Meeting, Education Section World Future Society, at the University of Houston at Clear Lake City, October 20-22, 1978, by Judith M. Barnet, President, Judith Barnet Associates, Consultants, and Instructor, Cape Cod Community College, Barnstable, Mass.

Anybody of sound mind has to be apprehensive about the immediate future of schools. Conservative hatchetry, zeal about basics, and the leveling that afflicts both students in over-large classes and teachers under union contracts cast dark, dark shadows over our mutual enterprise. All of us have colleagues who have been riffed or who have fled from teaching just ahead of the riffdozer. All of us have - or had - colleagues, especially from foreign language departments, whose jobs have been annihilated. With respect to language our attention to imminent facts like global interdependence is still lip-service. An ethnocentric people which prides itself on traveling light, we still consider a second language excess baggage.

We should be deeply worried by society's continued failure to meet the needs of minorities. In education this failure takes a particularly sinister, self-fulfilling turn as we dump linguistic as well as racial and ethnic minorities into special ed and label them "slow learners."

We should be gravely concerned about curriculum. One survey

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of the supposed best educational materials, a survey done by Educational Development Center in 1976, reveals a minimum of attention to concepts that I'd wager are of first importance to most people at this conference. Among those concepts: inter-disciplinary approaches; integration of local, national, and global perspectives; and integration of past, present, and future per-spectives. Only 3 of the 143 materials inspected by EDC even attempted a broad time perspective: even futures courses tended to drop the past from consideration. Few of the materials examined dealt with systems behavior, stressed the individual's role in the solution of problems, supplied positive models for - or directions toward - solutions, or gave positive views of other cultures. That list of deficiencies seems to me to amount to the outlines of a humanistic curriculum. Even allowing for flaws in that survey, it's obvious that the reform agenda bulges.

Another reason for real concern lurks in America's uncritical commitment to the technological perspective. With Thomas F. Green, Director of the Educational Policy Research Center at Syracuse University, I define the technological or managerial perspective as that which values skills and people utilisable by institutions in society, mainly economic and military, with aggregate production the chief source of the individual's value. At its worst, and it is certainly NOT always at its worst, the technological perspective is manipulative of things and people. Business and government attitudes toward language are an example of that kind of manipulation: we see language solely as a tool to get us what we want: if we can get it in English, what more do we need? Two more indictments:

first the technological perspective is hostile to certain lines of inquiry, especially those dealing with values, and second; it is overly narrow in its definition of the word "economic." If we look perceptively at that economic issue, we see that we have been dragged into an amoral labyrinth by the demand that time always be minimized and scale maximized. How blindly we worship those twin gods of the bottom line! Is it not amoral when basic human needs must be weighed first on the scale of what the rich can profit by? Also amoral, in the sense of destructive to community, is a social grid so big and complex that no one can effectively be held responsible or accountable. Governments, schools, businesses - more enterprises than we care to admit - are so firmly snared in that trap that even discussing responsibilities generates heat and anger. I'll cite only two illustrations. I warn you, this verges on radical analysis and the illustrations may seem peculiar until you start poking under the surface, something we clearly don't have time to do here. Both these representative situations I'm going to cite illustrate the technological perspective that I allege is the mainstream of American thinking; both supply evidence of the heat and anger generated when the system is questioned, and both supply evidence of an encouraging response. First, an event symbolic of a much larger movement: the defection of three nuclear engineers from General Electric on the grounds that the company was not adequately addressing the issue of safety. I see that sort of defection as a heartening "no in thunder" to the system that canonizes immediate needs and/or return

and sweeps the larger questions of consequences under the rug.

The second example I shall cite will seem perverse to some, but more than a few of you will cheer. Remember that I am taking heart from bold responses to the worst of the technological perspective. I welcome the outrageous degree of absenteeism in schools, because it says to me that our clients are finally refusing to put up with a poor product, and it says NO loudly enough that we producers of the services can't help but hear.

The dark shadows I have traced include shrinking public confidence in education, the failure of school materials and methods to meet the needs of their constituencies, and the philosophy underlying all these symptoms; a short-term view of what is utilitarian. Of course this problem doesn't belong solely to schools: it's an affliction of the social ethos as well. But look! With the revolt of our dissatisfied customers, the sky brightens! Rosy-fingered dawn streaks the darkness. A glow begins in the eastern sky. What grounds are there for feeling good?

After a long enslavement to an industrial model of social organization, we are beginning to see a resurgence of concern for development of a strong self-concept. The assembly line yields to the guild, so to speak. A new respect appears to be growing for the artisan/handyman/craftsman; for appropriate technology. The self-sufficiency model challenges the theoretical, impersonal, High Technology Fix mode that has reigned for a century. In the best situations, this movement is accompanied by a breaching of

the wall between school and community. And by a rejection of huge institutions. We begin to question centralization itself.

A product of economic reckoning, to be sure, centralization is now suspected of being wasteful of people and resources, needlessly expensive to the consumer, and non-viable in the long term.

If this doubting Thomas scenario does not seem to fit the public schools you know, consider the mavericks, the Foxfires, with students as historians, writers, editors, publishers. Consider Career Education, with its stress on Vocation with a capital V - rather than on vocational skills alone. Futurist literature uses the term FFRI (future focused role image) for the strong self-concept that these two movements are working at achieving. A strong self-concept builds on a foundation of coping skills. Here praise is due to the movement to teach economics in elementary and secondary schools. At last we are letting children develop insight into the wheel that moves societies. I'm not worried that brainwashing will process children into a robot-generation of dutiful capitalists; children are bright enough to ask questions if offered material important enough to ask questions about in a climate hospitable to questioning.

A strong self-concept grows when individual needs determine the what and how of teaching. Relaxation of the lockstep attitude toward schooling age would be one improvement. Don't look for it to be in place yet but at last there is real talk about lifelong education. The best formal design I know is Harold Shane's

"paracurriculum," a mix of formal and informal learning/work opportunities where there is no such thing as a school leaving age, hence no such thing as a drop out, hence a beginning of a real mix of ages in classrooms. Here the prospects of school/community interaction are at their rosiest. In Shane's design, schools even act as brokers to place people into non-school options at all the many points in a lifetime when that option is exercised.

The paracurriculum paradigm evolves logically from a development which is currently farther along: the growing contribution to formal education by non-traditional educators. Places like Ralph Borsodi's Schools for Living have been educating willing learners for decades. It's the old apprenticeship model. Maine's Shelter Institute and associations like New York's Lindisfarne and Scotland's Findhorn and the international New Alchemy Institute aren't in the curriculum of public schools, to be sure, but they supply a formidable amount of leading-edge information and technique to a growing number of seekers, many of whom are public school teachers.

Much more institutionalized, but not so long ago just as maverick, is the environmental movement. Just last week local newspapers ran a voluminous UPI report on that movement. An idea that couldn't get half a column on page 18 five years ago now merits two pages a day for three days! To say nothing of front page stories of one version or another every day. And there's a growing collaboration developing between schools and resource

agencies, the ones the U.N. calls NGO's, like Oxfam-America - organizations with the capability of producing and distributing excellent resource material on specific subjects. Oxfam, as most of you undoubtedly know, carries on a global food and hunger education campaign second to none, supplying superior rallying events, action points, and informational materials made to order for participation by schools. These humanistic responses contribute substantially to the public's and to schoolchildren's education whether world-wide and professional like the Oxfams or scruffy like the Clamshell Alliance on the east coast or its west coast sister, The Abalone Alliance. Of the latter, do not be deluded into thinking that low-key means ineffective. You should see the office that last May's Sun Day was coordinated out of: if a hole-in-the-wall like that can develop global tentacles, we can have faith in the power of right ideas.

This whole catalogue of humanistic goods has spilled forth from the kernel idea of concern for the self-concept. A second reason for optimism is a growing concern, in school and out, for an empathic sense of others. Start with Lawrence Kohlberg's principle that the most effective way to develop a moral sense (a sense of the group) is to walk in the other fellow's shoes. The kindergartner serves cookies and learns to think as provider as well as recipient; the new way of thinking affects behavior when the next impulse to steal a cookie strikes. The freshman troublemaker applies a formidable set of leadership skills to constructive collaboration rather than destructive nihilism when

asked to assume responsibility for the high school dance. And who can ever forget Levin in Anna Karenina, overcome by humility and respect for his peasants after his first full day of back-breaking labor in the fields? These are examples of empathy in the making. Others: the virtual explosion of Society and Technology courses in engineering schools, where future professionals are taught to consider the cultural impact of technology. That happens to be the name of Engineering 1101 at the School of Engineering and Applied Science at Columbia, and it's one of dozens, if not hundreds. I could cite George Schillinger's whole program at Brooklyn Polytechnic - and many others. At earlier levels: comparative culture studies place new emphasis on understanding self, then others. That's the approach of my own book on global awareness through folklore to be published in December by Global Perspectives in Education, Inc. Time prevents all the documentation required to demonstrate that we are dealing here not with isolated phenomena but with a movement. Suffice it to say that from the U.S. Office of Education straight through to textbook publishers, the "strange lands/friendly peoples" approach to culture studies is yielding to an empathic, interdependence orientation.

The sky brightens but a cloud looms. The third humanistic process that I want to discuss is so overdue that any further delay in implementing it should be seen as a storm warning. Curriculum is slowly, too slowly, becoming more holistic. It is too early to say that our devotion to specialization has been

stemmed, but at least we have recognized that specialization without integration opens up too many channels for mischief. Let's optimistically say that the need for holism is widely granted and that now we are figuring out how to achieve it. Here the principal tool has to be multidisciplinary, problem-centered curriculum. There are many options. One is a thematic approach. Global Perspectives in Education has created social studies lessons built upon the concepts of conflict, communication, change, and interdependence. Or the theme can be concrete: an eighth grade in a public school in Massachusetts studies the sea. Eighth grade science is marine biology; eighth grade history ranges from the Delian League to the Law of the Sea; language arts classes read the Odyssey, Mutiny on the Bounty, "The Open Boat," and Billy Budd. Then in industrial arts, all the students who have been theorizing about the arts, sciences, and history of seafaring build a boat! Learning about is joined to learning with, learning how-to, learning through.

Other possibilities of thematic curriculum raise equally enticing prospects. In an integrated study of habitat I see opportunities not only for social studies where students might trace the history of individual homeownership, and for art where they could experience cave paintings or Paolo Soleri's arcologies, but for mathematics: calculate space requirements from Bedouin tents to urban skyscrapers to planned communities like The Woodlands. Then let students build a real building: a shed for athletic equipment, for instance. In no time, and for real reasons, the math and other skills become part of students' core

of knowledge.

Teachers involved in multidisciplinary approaches like these report increased benefits to themselves equal to or beyond those noted for students. Motivation and productivity zoom among teachers enjoying greater interaction with other adults, more exchange of ideas, and a furtherance of their own coping skills. In another Massachusetts school - a private school this time - the whole school participates in an interdisciplinary project on survival. Students and teachers together address a problem crammed with history, alive with interaction of theoretical and practical, and unbeatable as a source of motivation. Imagine the range of attitudes and competencies produced by such a mutual enterprise: the coping skills, the caring skills, the commitment to community, the sense of individual responsibility! Can we still tolerate the old six period day punctuated by bells, or the stiff departmentalized colleges where silence falls should we happen to sit next to a stranger from another department at a faculty meeting?

Only a problem-centered curriculum, because it is inherently multidisciplinary, can grapple holistically with things that matter. Not only things of the future, either. It has been said that we need art to function as human beings in society; just as urgently do we need art and science to evaluate the life/technology/industry choices that societies before us have made. No past, present, or future social question can truly be answered without the combined mind sets of the economist, the political scientist, the biologist, the philosopher, the linguist, and the poet. For example, one of today's fundamental paradoxes deals with our attitudes toward time, and no

single point of view can address it. At the dawn of the era when technological power is so great that consequences of an invention, application, or event don't surface for decades, investors - beset by mounting uncertainties - are demanding shorter and shorter pay back periods. Yet soft technologies like solar and wind energy are inherently long term, not only in their approach to resources but in terms of return. Homo faber is at odds with homo economicus. How in heaven's name will our children address these complexities unless they start learning in wholes, in systems, from their earliest years?

Which will prevail, the dark shadows or the bright glow? Of course the future will see a mix. But in the terms of a light meter, I'd close the shutter down. The gathering strength, numbers, and sense of humanistic educators, in schools and out, signals optimism. I've saved one argument for last. May be I'm letting wishful thinking - or a sense of urgency - cloud my forecasting here. If the sort of curricular reform that I have sketched makes greater headway, it will accomplish something exceedingly important: a rapprochment with the technological perspective. You'll recall that I've dealt with the technological perspective before, in the dark shadows portion of this discussion. And we've conceded that the technological perspective is the dominant ethos in American society. Now if humanists can demonstrate that the holistic point-of-view works, we will have learned to speak a common language. Thus far the failing is as much ours as theirs. Technology operates in terms of efficiency: engineering efficiency plus cost effectiveness. Humanists need to learn to express the functionalism,

the instrumentality, of humanist ideas. We need to offer hard evidence of real gains achieved through holistic and problem-centered studies - gains in terms of increased motivation, higher productivity, and the rest of those common technological measurement tools. We have the data: we just haven't learned how to use them.

Admittedly the task we humanists set for ourselves here is a formidable one. I liken it to the effective use of the Environmental Impact Assessment process. We must continue insisting on that process as a metaphor for a stewardship point of view, taking scrupulous care to translate goals into terms that are more central to those for whom other points of view are more pressing. This means more willingness to express humanistic goals in dollar, efficiency, and convenience terms. This means nothing less than our learning to operate in the language of technology.

It has already been demonstrated that where the humanistic and technological points of view are woven into a fabric, the technological perspective can safely do what it does supremely well: energize. The potential exists for the evolution of a peculiarly 21st century American point of view: a lively, forward-looking technology, liberated from tunnel vision, modulated by the constraints of nature and human scale. Skeptics fearful of a death-of-progress, no-growth tone here should read Callenbach's Ecotopia, a scenario rich in challenge to the technological spirit. This is the threshold we're on now: the threshold of

tempering the shortsighted arc in the technological perspective with instrumental wisdom - and emerging into a geared-down but confident, future-welcoming era. I suspect you could call it the ecological vision.

What are its chances? In the spirit of futurists, let's do a little forecasting. Heedful of warnings about methodology, and having already committed the sin of borrowing witchcraft's imagery for the title of this essay, I'll proceed to extrapolate a scenario for the rest of this century. I suspect we can agree that the issue-attention cycle has operated by a rather clearly defined pattern in the decades since World War II. Each decade has quite literally reversed the ethos of the one before. Many observers note a parallel, for example, between the present decade and the self-centered, grey-flannel-suited 50s. Extrapolating quite strictly, the 80s might just be ripe for a reaction to what Mary McGrory calls the me-first, leave-me-alone generation of the 70s. We shouldn't be surprised, then, if the next swing of the pendulum is back toward the moral activism of the 60s. We should be prepared for it and make sure that any recharged social energies are shaped and guided by the holistic, person-centered, problem-centered, multi-disciplinary point of view. If we exercise these options, it seems to me that the prospects for a humanistic curriculum are bright.

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